



Our Alumni in the News

Kicking some ice

Synchronized skating team includes Saco residents and **John Niles Merrill**

By Garrick Hoffman, Staff Writer



is Elaine Letourneau (Saco). (Courtesy Heidi Coffin) SACO – After just one competitive season, Maine’s only adult synchronized skating team, the DownEasters, has returned home with two gold medals and a bronze medal.

Composed of 11 skaters – including four from Saco – and led by **Coach John Niles Merrill**, the DownEasters performed in four competitions and traveled as far as Hershey, Pennsylvania – where the U.S. Figure Skating Eastern Synchronized Skating Championships took place – to compete. Merrill said the 11 skaters range from ages 19 to 63, with a median age of 43.

Clelia Sigaud, 27, of Saco is a skater for the DownEasters and has been skating since she was 13. Sigaud said she’d like to see the DownEasters expand by splitting into more competitive divisions and recruiting more skaters, saying it would be “a winwin for everyone.” (Garrick Hoffman photo) The skaters from Saco include Clelia Sigaud, Chelsea Ferk, Lynne Cote and Elaine Letourneau.

The DownEasters practice one day a week at Norway Savings Bank Arena in Auburn because of the skaters’ tight schedules and diverse, spread-out living locations, Merrill said.

“This goes against even my better judgment,” Merrill said with a laugh, “but it has worked. To look at it on paper, or when they said it to me last year, I said we can’t do this. You’ve got to skate twice a week.”

DownEasters skaters come from towns such as Naples, Brunswick and Augusta, where Merrill lives. One skater comes from New Hampshire.

[Click here to read the rest of the article](#)

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Concord Township woman heads to Ice Capades reunion as oldest living member

By [Matt Skrajner](#), The News-Herald, Posted: 06/08/15, 3:38 PM EDT | Updated: on 06/09/2015



When Concord Township's Betty Barnes travels to Las Vegas later this month, she'll be able to relive her time with one of the most popular traveling shows of the past century.

Barnes, 94, is the oldest living member of the Ice Capades and is heading out West to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee for the 75th anniversary of the Ice Capades from June 21 to 24 at the Flamingo Las Vegas Hotel and Casino.

"It was a good way to see the country and I enjoyed it," Barnes said.

Growing up in Euclid, Barnes danced ballet and eventually fell in love with ice skating.

"Girls my age were all mesmerized by it," she said.

From 1942 to 1953, with a short break for the birth of her first child, Barnes traveled across the country and even to England as part of the Ice Capades. The show focused on ice skating, but also occasionally featured comedians, acrobats and jugglers.

Over the years, famous skaters including Olympic gold-medalists Dorothy Hamill and Scott Hamilton were members of the cast.

The performance was most successful from the 1940s to the 1980s, when popularity finally began to fade. The company eventually went out of business in the mid-1990s.

Barnes recalled practicing for an upcoming show in a parking lot outside of an arena in California. The group was preparing for a military-themed musical number and an actual Marine sergeant was brought in to help with the performance.

As one might expect, the sergeant was a bit harsh on the skaters and demanded perfection. Once the show started, the sergeant grabbed a front row seat.

[Click here to read the rest of the article](#)

Inspiration Video of the Month

Just when you think it's time to hang up your skates, watch **Donna Good (Marsden)**'s video and get inspired to put them back on. Donna was with West Company 1957-58, recently skated to a bronze medal at age 77.

Here is her story. I have continued to skate for all these past years, as it is my love and passion. Upon retirement and moving to Kelowna, B.C., I managed to find some ice sessions for seniors, and discovered that a few of them were formally competitive skaters and coaches, such as myself. I have coached for 35 yrs. plus while working in other areas as well.

[Click here to view her winning Bronze performance](#)



Recently the group of skaters I met up with, some still working, and some of us retired, we decided to compete in some adult competitions. I decided to go for it and entered **the Adult Bronze Interpretive Group V. This group was aged 56-80 yr.** I was the oldest competitor in the Skate Canada Super Series Final at age 77, also after having a total hip replacement. I was just recovering from the hip at the last reunion, but I did do the Street Dance! Way to go Donna. If you would like to congratulate Donna, this is her email address: dgooddcampbell@gmail.com

Where Are They Now?

Dave Pitts & Spanky

Where are you originally from? I was originally born in Evanston, Il, the northern small suburb that connects to Chicago.



Which shows were you with? I began in the West company show which is the one that reviewers stated that Spanky stole. After that, like most of comic, novelty acts, we went back and forth between East and West Companies from 1961 - 71.

Why did you want to join Ice Capades and was this your lifelong dream of skating in an ice show?

I had met John H. Harris when I was skating with Eis Ballet Baier's South American Extravaganza. I stated that I would love to skate in Ice Capades because it was the world's greatest ice show. He said that the current show was booked, but he would remember me for next year. I returned to Europe and sure enough. I received a contract the following spring from John H. It was for half the money I was making in Europe performing on ice, Casinos, TV, and clubs, but IT WAS ICE CAPADES. So I signed it in an instant. My salary I made up after that first year in West Company so Spanky and I were in Chimpanzee heaven.

What is your fondest memory? My fondest memories were actually two. The first was being able to skate in the same show with my hero, Freddie, and the second was when Spanky performed a 22 foot barrel jump night after night in East Company.





What did you do once you hung up your skates and what are you doing now? I now live in Buenos Aries, just down the street from my daughter and her family. As to what I'm doing now, I am finally enjoying life away from the entertainment world, but my heart still aches because of my leaving my dream show and family that I loved so much, Ice Capades.

I have been writing my memoirs since I moved to Buenos Aires. I hope to get it published soon so you can share my incredible journey.



“Memoirs Of A Chimp On The Rocks” is the autobiography of the International entertainment star, published author, and legendary exotic animal trainer, Dave Pitts. It was from his modest birth in Illinois thru his many years and adventures as an international celebrity in the entertainment industry to those of his attempting to live a somewhat normal life style on the edge of the non-forgiving, addictive world of entertainment that he had been so possessed with throughout his years of experimenting and searching for the missing love and acceptance that he had never received as a child. After a middle aged automobile accident that left him physically and mentally broken and destitute for 18-months as a homeless person, it was on the slow road to recovery that he had finally reached bottom from where he could once again find

the courage to fight his way back up to being accepted as an international businessman, creative technology designer, artist and published author. Living in a foreign country as an elderly senior citizen is where he has at last found the missing love and acceptance from his life long search in the innocent eyes of his Grandchildren.

There are 3 books to Dave’s trilogy. [Click here to read a quick synopsis on each book.](#)

Edwin Loeb



You may not remember his name but he spent his summers with us in AC always hanging around backstage. He was one of the show kids whose parents had been part of Ice Capades since the beginning. I asked him what it was like to be a ‘show kid’.

About being a show kid.....in the true sense of the phrase ' show kid ', I wasn't as I never traveled with the show with my folks, **Betty and Leo Loeb**. They met as performers in the 40's and were together until the late 60's. My mom was raising my sister and I in Cleveland and my Dad was addicted to the road, so they split up. My father was the road manager for a few years and then joined the Executive staff in various capacities.

My sister Lisa and I would visit my father in Atlantic City every summer for a few weeks starting in the late 60's. I was a rink rat, 12 years old and fascinated by the makings of Ice Capades. I would watch rehearsals all day and come to the show every night. I think I spent more time watching Moe Slutsky drum. I have been in every corner of Convention Hall, even in the half circled beams high above.

My first 'Job ' was working for Mr. (Jack) Balmer, making coffee every morning. I was also Bill Brenner's um, shadow/helper' working on the train cars, trailers etc. and learning some very colorful new phrases from Bill. I also got to work on one of the TV specials holding cue cards and running the tapes along with the orchestra during rehearsals. (Lorne Greene and Bobby Gentry were the guest stars). Later on, I would video tape the principal's performances for them to view. I was there the night The Jelineks fell and Maria broke her pelvis.

I also used to spend a lot of time on the bandstand during the day watching Joey Curran and others working on the tapes etc. When I was 19, Mr. Palmer called my house one day in Cleveland and 'asked ' (more like informed me) that I was joining Ice Capades as Audio Supervisor! LOL! As it turned out I didn't have the technical skills to fix the equipment, but I had a blast trying. I eventually went back to college.

Moving forward I was fortunate to land a job with 20th Century-Fox in the new home video field as their market rep in Texas and then LA. I later worked for Disney and Universal in Orlando in marketing, P.R. and special events for almost 20 years. I loved being part of the 75th Anniversary reunion team, in part to honor my mom, who is going to be 96 on March 29th and is still going strong, and as a way to re-connect with one of my all-time passions, the show.

I am semi-retired in Cleveland. As far as my favorite moment with the show, it was opening night in Atlantic City 1974 as the guy on the bandstand running those tapes and a member of Ice Capades! If you would like to connect with Edwin, he can be reached at edwinloeb@yahoo.com

Here's Edwin's own story from the trenches. We were playing Cleveland, my hometown. Every once in a while Lucien Meyer's chimp Mackey would act up. I saw a friend from high school during our run there and she told me she had seen the show and **loved my part in the monkey act. (?)** Mackey decided to climb up to the top of the set over the bandstand. It wasn't the first time. He sat up there taunting Lucien and the audience was roaring. The monkey wasn't budging. I had a candy bar and opened it and offered it up to Mackey. After a few moments he climbed down to get the candy and Lucien grabbed him. The audience was in stitches. I never told my friend the truth.

Another Trip Down Memory Lane



Doug Martin published a book called 'Frozen Community 'that contained a collection of stories and memories while he was on tour with Ice Capades for 11 years. For those of you who were lucky enough to have gotten a copy, the stories that he collected from our alumni certainly brought great memories and recollections. Because the book is no longer available, thought I would share with everyone some of the stories, some of which are classic. Am certain that it will give you a giggle or two with some of the antics that went on. We can always use a laugh or two.



Henry Seguin used to enjoy reading between numbers while doing a show. One night I got engrossed in a chapter, when all of a sudden I heard someone shout, “Hey, Cha Cha, number is starting in just a few! Get moving!” So I threw off my robe, got my glitzy hat, and rushed to the first row, ready to make my entrance. You know how it was, short people went on first. LOL. I got myself together just as the curtain opened. I was smiling my ass off, thinking, damn, it’s cold out here tonight. Well, on the third count of eight, with everyone behind me laughing, I realized I’d forgotten to put on my pants! I gave up reading between numbers after that night. Well, ok, I was told *not to*, and was razed about that episode for months after.

Richard Morse recollects his classic night in the spotlight – Shea Stadium

Memo from headquarters: “It’s important that we keep the Ice Capades name in New York.” The news that we were going to close in New York brought groans from the westerners, and disbelief all around, since the 4th incarnation of Madison Square Garden (where we would usually perform) was under construction. Therefore, our final performances would now be played at Shea Stadium.



The dressing room and orchestra, which fought to be heard over the deafening roar of La Guardia bound jets – were housed in tents between 1st and 2nd base, upon which sat the set, which had goosed the rafters of several arenas but now covered under the vast open sky. Its curtains were at full sail as the swirling winds from nearby Flushing Bay exposed its jungle gym frame. The skating field, protected from the sun during the day by canvas stretched over rut-generating saw horses, lay frozen between 2nd and 3rd base.

In this unlikely setting, in a venue famous for New York Mets and English Beatles, mankind was about to receive the answer to the

eternal question: **Is there a sound made when a tree falls at the ice show?** It was June 3rd, and everything was perfect for a night at the Ice Capades – for an audience of 28,000! The number in question was “A Flintstones Fantasy”which was a nightmare for one Ice Cadet, namely me.

Fred Flintstone manoeuvred his red Flintmobile among skating butterflies “(Flying” was still a decade away), battery pack-induced fireflies, top-heavy roses, dancing bees, and towering trees. When Wilma started berating Fred for getting them lost in an enchanted forest, that was the cue for everyone to clear the ice for an upcoming solo. I have no idea how it happened – perhaps I hit a rut – but faster than you can say “dendrology,” down I went, a toppled tree weighed down by a headpiece sprouting branches of boa, legs encased in a trunk-like hoopskirt, and no one left on the ice to help stand me up again (save for the bickering Fred and Wilma, who were of the mind that the show must go on, so pay no attention to the toppled tree rolling around in the dark.)

So, taking stock of my situation, I decided the first order of business was to somehow get the hello up, and second was to do so without dropping my trunk, thus exposing my midriff T-shirt, dance belt and hairy legs). It took a bit of flailing –much flailing actually – some shredding of my costume (wardrobe was not amused) several failed attempts (damn that trunk!), and a good part of Ann-Margareth Frei’s solo (sorry, Ann), but I finally righted myself, hiked up my hoop, secured my branches, and made a spotlighted exit to the sound of 56,000 clapping hands!

Picture of the Month

West Company Broom Ball Champions 1970

(Picture courtesy of Mike Edwards)



Back row: John Labreque (coach), Fred Lebuse (props), Jon Sorkan (skater) Bob Gallagher (company manager), John Adams (sound), Bullet Bob Basset (lights)

Front row: Dave Scott (skater), Ric Banville (stage manager), Mike Edwards (assistant), John Ross (alias Lionel Q. Devereaux - projector), Jim Scarborough (skater)

Comments from March Blade

Thank you for your on-going dedication to the Blade & IC alumni matters. I always enjoy each month's Blade. Smitten, I read an article about Wagenhoffer, and was saddened to learn about his way too early demise at age 39. Yes, Bob Turk will be sorely missed--but he at least achieved a full if not slightly above average number of birthdays. Keep up your extraordinary work! – Bob Strong

Thanks for all of the good work on the 'Blade'. We sure appreciate it. – Mike Edwards

Well dear Gloria, as always you outdid yourself once again!! Excellent read! – Jennifer Custer

Once again a great Blade. Thanks so much for all the hard work. – Gloria Dale-Johnson

- *I love that you are the writer for the Ice Capades Blade*
- *I love that you deeply care.*
- *I love that you are so creative*
- *I love how you think of everything and write about everything.*
- *I love how you touch our hearts, even though we do not tell you that.*
- *I love how you make us cry from the memories, that you do not want us to forget.*
- *I love that you find stories, from where we do not know.*
- *I love how you remind us that our life on the road was the best thing that ever happen to us, and something we will never forget, and shouldn't'*
- *I love how you have the knack to bring us closer and closer.*
- *I love that you are the only one that can do this for us.*
- *I love that you are the string that keeps us close.*
- *But most of all, I love that you have been my Big Sis for 49 years*

Written with love by Gigi Nakano

Upcoming Events



Skater's Reunion 2017 Prague

September 7 – 10, 2017

It is open to all skaters and crew from all different ice shows and ice circuses worldwide.

More information will be sent shortly, Questions: praguereunion2017@gmail.com

Website Update

The reunion website – www.icecapadesreunion2015.com is still there. Even though the reunion is over, the plan is to continue to use this site for alumni updates so please keep checking back from time to time as news will be added periodically. Don't forget, there are also show rosters for your reference, updated obits, reunion pictures and upcoming events.

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